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ORFORD STRING QUARTET

QUARTET-IN-RESIDENCE

ANDREW DAWES, Violin

TERENCE HELMER, Viola

KENNETH PERKINS, Violin

MARCEL ST-CYR, cello

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1979

8 P.M.

WALTER HALL

Next Orford Quartet concert: Sunday, February 17, 1980 at 3 pm.

PROGRAM

Quartet in B^b major, K. 458

W. A. Mozart

Allegro vivace assai

Menuetto and Trio: Moderato

Adagio

Allegro assai

The artistic "understanding" and mutual learning and teaching relationship between Mozart and Joseph Haydn must be one of the most fruitful in European music history and as rare in the eighteenth century as it is today. This relationship is particularly exemplified in the string quartet. Mozart's first attempts in the medium all come from the beginning of the 1770s. As Alfred Einstein succinctly states: "Between 1770 and 1774 Mozart became a quartet composer". The fifteen early quartets are K. 136-138, 155-160 and 168-173. The last six of these were written at Vienna in 1773 in response to Haydn's set of six quartets (Op.20) which appeared in 1771.

After a break of nine years, Haydn's Op. 33 ("Russian") quartets were issued in 1781. Similarly, Mozart wrote six quartets between 1783 and 1785 and dedicated the published work (Op.X) "to his dear friend Haydn". The great work which the elder composer had done in standardizing the general form and texture of the classical quartet, allowed Mozart to apply his marvellous gifts for melodic construction and tonal organization to the medium.

The quartet in B^b major, K. 458 (the fourth of Op. X) is dated 9th November, 1784. This quartet was first played before Mozart's father, with Haydn playing first violin.

It was on this occasion that Haydn is thought to have said that Mozart had "...the most consummate knowledge of the art of composition". The quartet received the nickname of "Hunt Quartet" because of the hunting-horn character of the opening theme in the first movement. After the recapitulation, a sizeable coda is added to this movement which utilizes material from both the first and second theme groups. The only complete Adagio movement in all the "Haydn Quartets" is found here.

The use of chromaticism in the melody as well as in the harmony

is a trait that is particularly Mozartean and can be used to clarify formal structure. The second half of the minuet is distinguished in this way from the rather diatonic first half. Closing material (in the exposition of the first movement and the ending of the Adagio) often begins with a chromatic "signpost". This is one of the traits which Haydn found novel.

Quartet in F major, Op. 92

S. Prokofiev

Allegro Sostenuto

Adagio

Allegro

Perhaps one of the most important qualities of Beethoven's musical genius which we value nowadays, is his forcefulness. His ego is stamped upon the music. Igor Stravinsky continued this tradition in a more cultured but no less an egoistical manner. One searches in vain for an artistic "peccavi" from either of these men concerning a completed work. What they have written, they have written. Not so with Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev. The Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution (on February 10, 1948) severely criticizing the creative errors of certain Soviet composers, among them Prokofiev. At a general meeting of composers in Moscow, Prokofiev admitted that he was in error. Concerning melody, which he considered "the most important element in music", the composer wrote in a letter: "To find a melody that is immediately understandable even to an unschooled listener and at the same time original - this is the most difficult thing for a composer. Many dangers lie in wait for him here. He is liable to fall into triviality or banality.....It is much easier to compose more complicated melodies.. I....fell into this trap....." He renounced the use of atonality in order "to throw the tonal passages into relief", as well.

Dichotomy was nothing new in Prokofiev's style. The use of harsh semi-tone dissonance which slaps the audience in the face was cultivated by the young Prokofiev when he was at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, much to the chagrin of his teacher, Lyadov. However, there are also the immediately accessible works such as Peter and the Wolf (1936) and the Classical Symphony (1916-1917).

The present quartet falls mainly into the second category. It is Prokofiev's second and last work in the medium. In 1940, he left his first wife (a singer whom he had met and married in the United States) and went away to the Caucasus with the niece of one of

Stalin's close associates. While living in the Kabardino-Balkarian sector, he became familiar with the music of the Mohammedan populace of the Soviet Union.

This quartet was finished (in piano score) on December 3, 1941. If parts of the quartet are reminiscent of Borodin (or any other composer of "the Five") but in a more modern garb, the reasons are not far to seek. The work is subtitled "Quartet on Kabardinian Themes" and the songs Getigezhev Ogurbi, Syuilyaklik Zhir and the Kabardinian dance tune Islambey (possibly a variant of Balakirev's source for his Islamey) are utilized. In the Adagio, the mixing of folk-tunes or folk-like melodies with an harmonic idiom of bridled dissonance produces a combination of great beauty. This music is meant to be enjoyed.

Quartet in C[#] minor, Op. 131

L. van Beethoven

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo

Allegro molto vivace

Allegro moderato, Adagio

Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile

Presto

Adagio quasi un poco andante

Allegro

This quartet was completed in 1826 (after the A minor quartet, Op. 132). In this, as in all the late quartets, form or construction is of paramount importance. Intrinsic melodic worth is far less important than the way melody can be manipulated. There are no full stops between any of the movements. By this means, and by manipulation of motives, overall comprehensibility is achieved.

The opening movement is a slow fugue. In order to alleviate the intensity of the first movement, the second is fast, in 6/8 time, in sonata-form without the development section and is based on a symmetrical eight-bar melody.

The following interlude seems to start out like a full-scale Allegro movement but slows down (by means of a short violin cadenza) into an introduction to the next movement. The Andante is a theme and six variations in A major and the Presto is a Scherzo and Trio in E major. A slow, lyrical and short movement follows, based, according to Fétis, on an old French folk-song. To tie up the work Beethoven chooses a full-fledged sonata-form finale. After a large Coda, the work ends triumphantly on the tonic major chord.

Notes by David McCartney